

## **The Influenza Vaccine (Flu Shot)**

### **What is the influenza vaccine?**

The influenza vaccine is a shot that can protect you from or lessen the symptoms of the viral infection commonly known as the “flu.” Flu symptoms often include weakness, fatigue, fever, chills, muscle aches, headaches, a runny nose, sneezing, a sore throat, coughing, and nausea.

Most people who get the flu are back on their feet within a week. However, for people in the high-risk categories listed below, flu symptoms can hit harder and last longer, and can lead to complications like pneumonia. For these people, the flu can be severe and even fatal.

### **Who needs to be concerned about influenza?**

While anybody can catch the flu (especially when it is widespread in the community), certain people are particularly susceptible to the complications that can follow. The following people are considered as *high* risk for flu complications:

- People age 50 years or older,
- Residents of nursing homes or other long-term care facilities,
- Health care workers,
- People with chronic heart, lung, or kidney disease,
- People with diabetes or other chronic metabolic disorders,
- People with weak immune systems, and
- Anyone 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatment (who could develop Reye Syndrome if they catch the flu).

### **What can I do to prevent influenza and its complications?**

The influenza vaccination (flu shot) can help protect you against influenza and its complications. People at *high* risk should receive a flu shot each fall (November is the best time to get vaccinated). A yearly vaccination is needed because each year, the influenza vaccine is modified to fight changing flu viruses. If you do not fall into any of the high-risk categories, consult your doctor about your need for the vaccine.

### **Additional information**

If you are allergic to eggs, you may have an allergic reaction to the flu shot, so be sure to consult your doctor for advice. Most other people have little or no reaction to the influenza vaccine. Some may experience minor redness or swelling at the site of the injection. A small number may feel slightly ill or develop a fever within 24 hours, but this lasts for no more than a few days. A flu shot will not give you the flu.